

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0729

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y F O R T E X T

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PDIP PINT PROP LA

SUBJECT: VIENTIANE DIPLOMATIC CORPS VISITS VIENG SAY AND SAM NEUA

SUMMARY: SECOND SECRETARY CHAMBERLIN AND I WENT ALONG ON DIPLOMATIC CORPS VISIT TO VIENG SAY AND SAM NEUA DURING THE LAO NEW YEAR HOLIDAY. WE WERE ENTERTAINED BY LOCAL OFFICIALS, VISITED THE CABES FROM WHICH THE PATHET LAO OPERATED DURING THE WAR, AND OBSERVED A NUMBER OF INTERESTING THINGS ABOUT SOVIET, CUBAN, AND VIETNAMESE ACTIVITIES, ABOUT THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF VIENG SAY, THE POLITICAL CHARACTER OF SAM NEUA, AND GENERAL ECONOMIC AND LIVING CONDITIONS.

1. MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS WENT ON A FOREIGN MINISTRY SPONSORED VISIT TO VIENG SAY AND SAM NEUA APRIL 13, 14 AND 15, THE LAO NEW YEAR HOLIDAY (PHI MAI). REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PHILIPPINES, UNITED KINGDOM, USSR, FRANCE, INDIA, POLAND, BULGARIA, JAPAN, CONFIDENTIAL

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EGYPT, WEST GERMAN, UNITED STATES, INDONESIA, BURMA, MALAYSIA, THAILAND, SWEDEN (FROM BANGKOK), UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF AND UNCTAD MADE THE TRIP. THERE WERE THE USUAL FOLKLORE PRESENTATIONS AND LAMVONGS PLUS VISITS TO VILLAGE CELEBRATIONS WITH MORE LAMVONGS AND THROWING OF WATER ON THE VISITORS. THE VISITORS WERE PUT UP IN A NEW, AUSTERE BUT ADEQUATE HOTEL AT VIENG SAY.

ACCOMMODATIONS WERE GOOD BY LOCAL STANDARDS, THE ONLY PROBLEM BEING A SHORTAGE OF WATER DUE TO A PUMP FAILURE. WE OBSERVED A NUMBER OF INTERESTING THINGS, AS FOLLOWS:

2. SOVIET PRESENCE IN PLAIN OF JARS: PASSING OVER A NEW JET LENGTH AIRSTRIP UNDER CONSTRUCTION AT XIENG KHOUANG, I SAW TWENTY TRAINER AIRCRAFT LINED UP CLOSELY ON THE GROUND NOT FAR FROM THE STRIP. THERE WERE NUMEROUS TIN ROOFED BUILDINGS IN THE AREA, ALL PRESEUMABLY CONSTRUCTED WITHIN THE PAST TWO YEARS. I ASSUME THIS WAS THE SITE OF SOVIET PILOT TRAINING OPERATIONS.

3. LITTLE SOVIET INFLUENCE IN VIENG SAY MILITARY REGION: SOLDIERS AND STUDENTS IN VIENG SAY TOLD US THAT THERE WERE NO RESIDENT SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS, TECHNICIANS OR TEACHERS IN THE VIENG SAY MILITARY REGION. SOVIET PILOTS OFTEN AIRLIFTED SUPPLIES AND PASSENGERS INTO VIENG SAY BUT ONLY REMAINED OVERNIGHT WHEN WEATHER CONDITIONS WERE BAD. SOLDIERS ADDED THAT OUR DIPLOMATIC GROUP WAS THE ONLY GROUP OF "WESTERNERS" THAT THEY HAD SEEN VISITING VIENG SAY IN THE PAST YEAR, ALTHOUGH ANOTHER DIPLOMATIC SOURCE SAID THE CZECH, CUBAN AND HUNGARIAN AMBASSADORS HAD VISITED VIENG SAY THREE MONTHS EARLIER.

4. CUBAN MEDICAL PROJECT: OFFICIALS FROM VIENG SAY MILITARY REGION HOSPITAL SAID THAT THERE HAD BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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THREE CUBAN MEDICAL TEAMS, EACH TRAINING LAO "MEDICS" FOR A PERIOD OF ONE YEAR. THE FIRST TEAM OF FIVE DOCTORS AND NURSES ARRIVED IN 1973 AND THE THIRD AND FINAL TEAM OF TWELVE DEPARTED IN EARLY 1976. LOCAL SOLDIERS AND STUDENTS SAID THERE WERE NO CUBAN MILITARY ADVISORS AT THE VIENG SAY MILITARY SCHOOL.

5. VIETNAMESE AID PROJECTS: A VIENG SAY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SAID THAT THERE HAD ONCE BEEN MANY VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS AND TEACHERS THERE BUT THAT NOW FEWER THAN TEN REMAINED AS ORDINARY HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS. STUDENT SAID THERE WERE NO VIETNAMESE MILITARY ADVISORS LEFT IN VIENG SAY. HE ADDED THAT MANY LAO STUDENTS WERE SENT TO HANOI ON EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS. THE ONLY SURGEON AT THE VIENG SAY HOSPITAL, NEWLY CONSTRUCTED AT THE BASE OF THE CAVE THAT WAS THE FORMER HOSPITAL, WAS VIETNAMESE, AS WERE MOST OF THE NURSES. A LOCAL LAO RESIDENT OF SAM NEUA TOLD US THAT THERE WERE MANY VIETNAMESE ENGINEERS AND WORKERS THERE CONSTRUCTING A

BRIDGE, ROADS AND ADMINISTRATIVE BUILDINGS. MANY OF THESE VIETNAMESE WORKERS COULD NO SPEAK LAO.

6. POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF VIENG SAY: COMMANDER OF VIENG SAY MILITARY REGION TOLD US THAT REGION IS NOT UNDER CIVILIAN SAM NEUA PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION BUT RATHER UNDER A SEPARATE MILITARY ADMINISTRATION. FRENCH AMBASSADOR WAS TOLD BY SOME VIENG SAY OFFICIALS THAT THERE WERE 4,000 PEOPLE IN THE VIENG SAY TASSENG OF WHOM ONLY 40 (OR 1 PERCENT) WERE PARTY MEMBERS.

7. POLITICAL CHARACTER OF SAM NEUA: WE VISITED THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF SAM NEUA PROVINCE, SAM NEUA CITY. LOCAL OFFICIALS TOLD US THE FORMER CITY HAD BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY AERIAL BOMBARDMENT AND HAD BEEN RECONSTRUCTED. TWO SEPARATE BUILDINGS WERE POINTED OUT TO US AS "THE ONLY BUILDING THAT ESCAPED
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DESTRUCTION". THE PROVINCE, WE WERE TOLD, HAS A POPULATION OF 8,000 AND IS SUBDIVIDED INTO DISTRICTS (MUONGS), SUB-DISTRICTS (TASSENGS), VILLAGES (BANS), QUARTERS (KHUMS) AND UNITS (NOIS). ALTHOUGH SAM NEUA HAS BEEN CONTROLLED BY A COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATION FOR MANY YEARS, IT WAS THE ONE PLACE WHERE WEE OBSERVED BUDDHIST RELIGIOUS PARTICIPATION IN THE PHI MAI CEREMONY. BUDDHIST MONKS SAID PRAYERS AND PRESIDED OVER THE TRADITIONAL BATHING OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE AT A NEWLY BUILT BUDDIST TEMPLE.

8. VIENG SAY AS A MONUMENT TO THE LAO REVOLUTION: LAO OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, WHO WENT ALONG ON THE TRIP IN ORDER TO PREPARE A BROCHURE ON VIENG SAY, TOLD US THAT THE GOVERNMENT PLANNED TO MAKE VIENG SAY A HISTORICAL MONUMENT TO THE PARTY'S VICTORY. WE WERE TAKEN FIRST TO "MISTER SOUPHANOUVONG'S

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CAVE AND THEN TO KAYSONE PHOMVIHANE'S CAVE, THE
CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING HALL CAVE, AND GENERAL
KHAMTHAY SIPHANDONE'S CAVE HEADQUARTERS. NEW RESI-
DENCE BUILDINGS HAD BEEN CONSTRUCTED OUTSIDE SOUPHAN-
OUVONG'S AND KAYSONE'S CAVES SINCE THE CEASEFIRE.
MILITARY COMMANDER OF VIENG SAY REGION EMPHASIZED
THAT "MISTER" SOUPHANOUVONG WAS THE "FATHER OF LAOS".
IF IT WERE NOT FOR HIM THERE WOULD BE NO LPDR TODAY.
THE COMMANDER DID NOT MAKE SIMILAR COMPLIMENTARY
REMARKS ABOUT KAYSONE, ALTHOUGH KAYSONE'S CAVE INDI-
CATED THAT HIS ROLE HAD BEEN MORE IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT
WAS NOTICEABLY LARGER THAN SOUPHANOUVONG'S WE WERE
NOT TAKEN TO PHOUMI VONGVICHIT'S CAVE NOR TO PHOUNE
SIPRASEUTH'S, NOR WAS ANY SPECIAL MENTION MADE OF
FAYDANG LOBIAYAO OR SITHANE KOMMADAM. HOWEVER, OUR
GUIDES REPEATEDLY DREW OUR ATTENTION TO NUMEROUS BOMB
CRATERS MARKING THE AREA AS WELL AS TO A PORTION OF A
BOMB TAIL FIN DECORATING THE ENTRANCE TO GENERAL
KHAMTHAY SIPHANDONE'S CAVE.

9. EASTERN PROVINCE: ON AN OLD AND CRUEDELY DRAWN
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MILITARY MAP HANGING IN THE MEETING ROOM OF
KAYSONE'S CAVE, WE NOTICED THAT A PROVINCE CALLED
"EASTERN PROVINCE" WAS CLEARLY MARKED LOCATED IN THE
SOUTHEASTERNMOST CORNER OF THE LPDR IN THE ATTOPEU
AREA.

10. REEDUCATION CAMPS FOR FORMER ROYALISTS: WE ASKED
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICIALS, SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS
AND COMMON SOLDIERS, STUDENTS AND DOCTORS, ABOUT THE
REEDUCATION CAMPS FOR FORMER ROYAL LAO ARMY OFFICERS
AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, BUT GOT VERY LITTLE NEW
INFORMATION. THEY TOLD US THAT CAMPS WERE LOCATED
FROM 30 TO 300 KILOMETERS FROM VIENG SAY MILITARY

HEADQUARTERS WHERE WE WERE STAYING. THEY SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAD HOPED TO TAKE US TO A CAMP BUT THAT THE ROADS WERE TOO POOR AND ADDED THAT THE CAMP INMATES WERE ALL HEALTHY AND STRONG. THEY ALSO TOLD US THAT THE FORMER ROYALISTS HAD COMPLETED THEIR EDUCATION AND HAD BEEN ASSIMILATED INTO LOCAL AGRICULTURAL VILLAGES. AT ONE POINT ONE OF OUR GUIDES, FORMERLY ASSIGNED TO THE LAO EMBASSY IN HAVANA, SAID THERE WERE NO MORE VIENTIANE SIDE OFFICIALS LEFT SINCE ALL HAD BECOME SUPPORTERS OF THE REVOLUTION. SOMEBODY ASKED WHEN THESE PEOPLE COULD AGAIN VISIT VIENTIANE AND THE GUIDE REPLIED THAT THAT WOULD DEPEND ON THE OUTCOME OF THEIR SEMINARS.

11.. WHEREABOUTS OF THE FORMER KING: QUESTIONS ABOUT THE KING'S WHEREABOUTS WERE ANSWERED CONSISTENTLY BY A WIDE VARIETY OF PERSONS QUESTIONED WITH "I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE KING."

12. ECONOMIC AND LIVING CONDITIONS: WE MADE A MORNING TOUR OF OUTLYING VILLAGES AROUND VIENG SAY WHERE THE PADDY FARMERS WERE CELEBRATING THE PHI MAI FESTIVAL. THE VILLAGERS, WHO, WERE TOLD, HAD LIVED

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IN THE FORESTS DURING THE BOMBING, SEEMED WELL ESTABLISHED AND PROSPEROUS. WE NOTICED THAT THERE WERE VERY FEW WATER BUFFALO, ALMOST NO CATTLE AND FEW PIGS. STUDENTS IN VIENG SAY TOLD US MEAT WAS SELDOM SOLD IN THE LOCAL MARKET BUT THAT THERE WAS ALWAYS A SUFFICIENT QUANTITY OF A LIMITED VARIETY OF VEGETABLES. LIVESTOCK, MOSTLY WATER BUFFALO, BECAME MORE NUMEROUS THE CLOSER WE GOT TO SAM NEUA TOWN. WE SAW CRISP NEW "LIBERATION KIP" NOTES PASSING THE COUNTER AT THE GOVERNMENT STORE OF SAM NEUA, WHERE THE POPULATION COULD BUY PRODUCTS GIVEN TO THE LPDR AS COMMODITY AID. ITEMS SUCH AS VIETNAMESE MANUFACTURED CLOTH AND CANNED GOODS, ALBANIAN JAM, CHINESE FLASHLIGHTS, THERMOS BOTTLES, CIGARETTE LIGHTERS AND DISPATCH CASES, AND YUGOSLAV MASHED POTATOS WERE SOLD FOR THE SAME LOW PRICES THAT PREVAIL IN VIENTIANE STATE STORES.

13. COMMENT: SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS NOUPHAN SITHPASAY, WHO HAD SPENT EIGHT YEARS IN VIENG SAY, ACCOMPANIED THE VISITORS AND ACTED AS HOST DURING THE VISIT. HE WAS ASSISTED BY DEPUTY DIRECTORS OF PROTOCOL KHAMTHAN RATANAVONG AND SOUTSAKONE PATHAMMAVONG, BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S PRIVATE DOCTOR, DR. KHAMPHAY, WHO HAD SPENT FOUR YEARS IN VIENG SAY AFTER BEING EDUCATED IN FRANCE AND CZECHO-

SLOVAKIA, AND BY DR. KITHONG VONGSAY, DIRECTOR OF PRESS AND INFORMATION AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY. WE BELIEVE THAT THE PURPOSE OF THE VISIT WAS TO SIGNIFY THE FINALITY OF THE PASSING OF THE OLD REGIME BY TRANSFERRING THE SITE OF THIS IMPORTANT TRADITIONAL LAO FESTIVAL FROM THE ROYAL CAPITAL OF LUANG PRABANG TO THE REVOLUTIONARY CAPITAL OF VIENG SAY. WE BELIEVE THE LPDR ALSO INTENDS TO ESTABLISH VIENG SAY AS A MONUMENT OF THE REVOLUTION, AND THAT THIS VISIT WAS PART OF THAT PROCESS. THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF THE VIENG SAY AND SAM NEUA OFFICIALS TO THE VISITING
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DIPLOMATS WAS FRIENDLY ALTHOUGH OUR INITIAL BRIEFING ON APRIL 13 DID HARP SO HEAVILY AND IN SUCH GREAT DETAIL ON AMERICAN AIR BOMBARDMENT THAT I STROLLED OUT OF IT LEAVING MS. CHAMBERLIN TO COVER IT. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE OF THIS KIND OF THING IN SUBSEQUENT BRIEFINGS.
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Message Attributes

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